

From Douglas Fisher:

For the purpose of this study, we have adopted the definition of close reading proposed by the Aspen Institute, an educational and policy studies group with significant influence on practice (Brown & Kappes, 2012):

Close Reading of text involves an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings done over multiple instructional lessons. Through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as key vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context; attention to form, tone, imagery and/or rhetorical devices; the significance of word choice and syntax; and the discovery of different levels of meaning as passages are read multiple times. (p. 2)

In our implementation of close reading, we focused on the following salient features (e.g., Boyles, 2013; Fisher & Frey, 2012):

1. *Short, complex passages*: The texts selected ranged from three paragraphs to three pages. These passages were assessed to ensure that they were appropriately complex, meaning that they fell in the quantitative range of text complexity recommended in the Common Core State Standards (National Governor's Association, 2010). For grades 6-8, this means that the selected texts generally ranged between a Lexile level of 925 and 1185. As part of the analysis, we determined the qualitative factors of text complexity (see Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012 for the rubric), which would become the teaching points for the lessons.
2. *Repeated reading*: The structure of the lesson allows for students to re-read a selected text for different purposes and to answer different questions. Research evidence over the years suggests that repeated reading of the same text can improve fluency and comprehension (e.g., Therrien, 2004). However, we were sensitive to the comments of Nichols, Rupley, and Rasinski (2009) who suggested that "[c]ontinual reliance on repeated readings without appropriate guidance and support can lead to diminished student engagement and may not help students recognize that increased fluency provides for more focus on meaning" (p. 5).
3. *Annotation*: Students notate directly on the texts as they read, identifying main ideas, circling confusing words or phrases, and writing margin notes such as questions, reactions, and examples. This approach can be used for narrative or informational texts, in both print and digital environments (Castek & Beach, 2013; Zywica & Gomez, 2008).
4. *Text-dependent questions*: These questions require that students provide evidence from the text for their responses. The questions are not limited to recall, but rather focus on various aspects of the text. We used the Common Core reading standards as a source of inspiration for the text-dependent questions, focusing on key details, general understandings, vocabulary and word choice, text structure, textual comparisons, and evidence-based arguments.
5. *Discussion of the text, including argumentation*: As part of every close reading lesson, students should interact with their peers and their teachers using academic language and argumentation. If they can read a text without this type of interaction, it's probably not complex enough and not worthy of close reading. Text-based discussions improve comprehension and allow students to clarify their thinking and consider the thinking of others (Kucan & Palincsar, 2013).